Teaching American History Primary Sources Lesson Plan

**Lesson Title:** Civil Rights Turning Points in Alabama

**Author Name:** Jennifer Chandler

**Contact Information:** jchandler@carson.k12.nv.us

**Appropriate for Grade Level(s):** 10-12

**Social Studies Standard(s):**

*H3.[9-12].9* Identify and describe the major issues, events, and people of minority rights movements.

*H3.[9-12].5* Analyze major social movements in the United States and explain their impact on the changing social and politicalculture.

**Objective(s):** At the end of this lesson, students will recognize the pivotal nature of the events in Alabama to the Civil Rights movement by reading two first-hand accounts of the situation and analyzing photographs of the events in Selma, Alabama. Students must have background knowledge of key events in the Civil Rights Movement prior to 1965.

**Primary Sources (at least 3 used in lesson):**

*Written Documents*

Document #1 – Willie Bolden Personal Recollection of February 18, 1965 in Marion, Alabama

Document #2 – Sheyann Webb Personal Recollection of First Selma March, March 7, 1965

*Photographs*

Document #3 – “When You Pray, Move Your Feet” – Photo of first Selma march demonstrators

Document #4 – Troopers Gassing and Beating Demonstrators

Document #5 – Alabama Police Confront Selma Demonstrators

Document # 6 – Aerial View of Marchers Crossing Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 21, 1965

**Total Time Needed:** 4 days – block schedule class periods

**Historical Background & Context:** Following the passage of the 15th Amendment, many parts of the formerly Confederate, slave holding South continued to refuse African-Americans their rights. Just one of the many rights denied was the right to vote. State governments, local law enforcement and voter registration centers were dominated by whites and did all they could to hurt, threaten, intimidate and physically obstruct African Americans from both registering to vote and exercising their vote at the polls. African Americans were charged unfair poll taxes, given literacy tests, barred from polling centers and turned away from voter registration offices. Black Americans worked systematically over time through carefully coordinated non-violent methods almost always sacrificing their personal well being to draw the nation’s attention to their plight. 1965 proved to be a pivotal year in the Civil Rights Movement, a sort of culmination to decades of fighting for suffrage. Two major groups that were part of the Civil Rights Movement were the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Both SCLC and SNCC were working together to guarantee voting rights for black voters in the state of Alabama. Alabama represented the gross disparity of the situation present in many parts of the nation. In Dallas County, Alabama over one half of the population was black yet a mere two percent were registered voters. On February, 18, 1965 African Americans were peacefully marching in Marion, Alabama in protest of the unjust arrest of SCLC’s field secretary James Orange. During the march an African American leader by the name of Jimmie Lee Johnson was shot in the stomach by an Alabama State Trooper while trying to protect his mother from being beaten by law enforcement at Mack’s Café. Johnson died eight days later. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Jackson four days after the shooting and eulogized Jackson at his funeral noting, “We must be concerned not merely about who murdered him but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderer.” (King, 3 March 1965)

Continuing to non-violently demand their Constitutional right to vote be protected and carried out, the SCLD organized a march from Selma to Alabama’s capitol of Montgomery. Unknown to demonstrators at the time, there would be three different marches that begin in Selma. The first march began on March 7, 1965. As demonstrators attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma they were met with brutal force. Marchers were mercilessly beaten with billy clubs, whipped and gassed by Alabama State Troopers. Images of the unfolding situation were broadcast nationwide on television and demonstrations protesting the violence broke out in eighty cities across the country. In the wake of the violence, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. flew to Selma. He organized a large group of demonstrators who marched to the bridge and then stopped. They held a prayer service on the bridge and then returned to Selma. A federal judge reviewed the case and ruled that the demonstrators had the right to march and provided National Guard protection. Twenty five thousand demonstrators marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama on March 21 – 25 proclaiming their right to vote.

The march from Selma to Montgomery is credited with directly contributing to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 guaranteeing the right of all Americans the right to vote (at this point in history, age 21 and over). Selma is also referred to in LBJ’s Address to Congress, many letters protesting treatment of African-Americans and is heralded as a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement.

**Detailed Steps of Lesson:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time Frame****(e.g. 15 minutes)** | **What is the teacher doing?**  | **What are students doing?** |
| Day 1 |  |  |
| 30 minutes | Divide students into small groups. | Complete a Civil Rights Hotspots map using a timeline of major Civil Rights milestones |
| 30 minutes | Assign each group to quickly summarize each event leading up to 1965 | Groups summarize their event and share with the class, those listening take brief notes |
| 20 minutes | Ask the Historical Question: Why did African Americans press for social and political change in the United States? | Students will work together to compile a list of the political and social changes African Americans sought and the methods they used to press for change as a formative assessment piece. |
| 20 minutes | Provide background information to students through textbook or powerpoint as necessary prior to Primary Source Analysis | Students will take notes on key leaders and background information on Alabama in 1965. |
| Day 2 |  |  |
| 45 minutes | Create Primary Source JigSaw Stations, placing one Source at each station, group students accordingly | Interacting with each of the Primary sources and completing the scaffolding questions as a group, students will record answers to selected questions on poster paper for whole group analysis later. |
| 30 minutes | Post answers to selected Primary source Questions for all students to see, discuss each as a class | Add information and supplement their answers to the scaffolding questions |
| 20 minutes | Return to the Historical Question: Why did African Americans press for social and political change in the United States? | Students will return to their list from Day 1 and edit, add to or delete information |
| Day 3 |  |  |
| 30 minutes | Ask students to consider the question:Why did African Americans press for social and political change? Distribute the Prove It! Handout | Students are working in groups reviewing their primary source packets and answering the question using proof from the sources. |
| 45 minutes | Show students the photograph of the Third Selma March as a talking pointPlay LBJ’s Message to Congress regarding passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and/or provide copies for students to refer to | As they listen to or read the address, have students note improvements in the situation and anticipate possible setbacks |
| 15 minutes | Assign students homework to research developments in civil rights after Selma |  |
| Day 4 | Assign summative assessment: Poster Project | Students will complete posters linking Civil Rights experiences in Marion and Selma to political and social change. |
|  |  |  |
|  |  | (Add additional rows, if necessary.) |

**Description of Lesson Assessment Tied to Objective/Standards:** Students must independently answer the question “Why did African Americans press for social and political change?”

**Document #1 – Personal Recollection of Willie Bolden**

**February 18, 1965**

**Marion, Alabama**

The cameras were shooting, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, we heard cameras being broken, newspapermen being hit, and looked around and saw folk trying to run out of the church. And what they had done, they had gone through the side and the back of the church, and the troopers were in there beating folk . . . trying to get’em out, and troopers were outside along with the local police and sheriff department, beating folk out there. Okay? I’ll never forget this night.

A big, white cop – well, a big white fella in a suit – came up to me – I was still in the front of the march – and stuck a double-barrel shotgun, cocked, in my stomach and said, “You’re the [racial epithet] from Atlanta, aren’t you?” And I said, “Yes.” He said, “Somebody want to see you across the street.” Now, while all of this was going on, people were still getting beaten. Okay? So he took me across the street, and there was a guy standing there who claimed to have been the sheriff, and I think he was because of his badge, with some red suspenders and chewing tobacco and one of those big hats on. Said, “Now, you see what you caused.” And I said, “How did I do that?” He said, “Because if you had kept yo’ black [expletive] in Atlanta, this would not have happened.” I said, “I didn’t come here from Atlanta. I came here from Selma, Alabama.” He said, “If you had stayed there, this would not have happened.” I said, “The Constitution gives us the right to peacefully protest whatever grievance we might have.” He said, “You don’t have any constitutional rights in my town.” I said, “Yeah, so I see.” At that time, folks were still getting beaten.

He grabbed me by the coat and spin me around, and he said, “I just want you to watch this.” Folk were running over each other and trying to protect themselves. So I began to cry, ‘cause it was just . . . you had to see it . . . . it was just, just . . . you could just see folks grabbing their heads. And one guy was running over toward in our direction, and he saw the polices standin’ there by the sheriff, and he tried to make a turn, and when he did, he ran into one of those local cops, and they hit him in the head, and it just bust his head wide open. Blood spewed all over, and he fell. And I tried to get over there to him, and the sheriff pulled me back, and I turned around to say something to him, and when I turned around he stuck a .38 snubnose right in my mouth. He said, “What you gon’ say?” I said, “I ain’t gon’ say nothin’.”

He cocked the hammer back, and he said, “What I really need to do is blow your brains out.” Of course, I didn’t say nothin’. I was scared to death, and all I could see was those rounds in that chamber. He said, “Take this [racial epithet] over there to the jail.” The jail was right up the street from the church and right across the street from the courthouse. So they took me over there, and in taking me over there, the guy just hit me all over the arm, legs, thighs, and the chin, really did me in kind of bad. And when I walked in the door, there was blood on the floor. Just literally puddles of blood leading all the way up the stairs to the jail cell. And when I got up there, folk were hollering, “I need a doctor, I need a doctor, I need a doctor.” And nobody paid any attention to ‘em. And when the guy opened the cell where I was to push me in, two of ‘em caught me at the same time side the head there. The only thing probably saved me a little bit was when the first guy hit me and the other one attempted to hit me, all his billy club did was hit the stick that was already here, so I got kind double job, bip-bip. When they pushed me in, my forehead hit the top bunk in the thing, and I had a big knot there.

Shortly after I was in there, that’s when we heard the shots. Well that’s when Jimmie Lee Jackson got killed. The cop was beating on his mama, and he was headed toward his mother, and that’s when they shot him. ‘Course, I never read anything like that in these books and things that I’ve read about the Civil Rights Movement and why Jimmie Lee Jackson was killed or how he got killed. Much of what I told you, I have never read in a book period about what took place at a particular situation. I am inclined to believe that they got their information either from the paper or tried to analyze some filmstrips on what happened. Even in filming, in many cases, they missed a lot of it because if the [expletive] was gonna really go down, those folk tired to get those cameras out of the way first. And many times even after they were able to put the camera back into motion, much of the real bloody part of these matches was all over.

1. Underline all of the words in the reading that refer to law enforcement. List them below:
2. Find each statement in the reading and underline it. Then place the events in chronological order with “1” being the first event.

\_\_\_\_\_ Willie hears someone being shot. He finds out later it was Jimmie Lee Jackson.

\_\_\_\_\_ As cameras are filming, suddenly Willie hears cameras being broken and newspapermen being hit.

\_\_\_\_\_ The cops take Willie to jail. When he arrives at the jail there is blood everywhere. He is beaten as he is thrown into a cell.

\_\_\_\_\_ Willie is taken across the street to a sheriff who says “Now you see what you’ve caused.”

\_\_\_\_\_\_ The cops hit a man in the head and bust it wide open. Willie is prevented from helping him.

1. Why were cameramen and newspaper reporters attacked?
2. Find evidence from the reading that proves Willie was treated unfairly on purpose:
3. Why was Jimmie Lee Jackson shot? How does this make you feel?
4. Why does Willie say that this part of the Civil Rights Movement is rarely heard about? Find two reasons directly from the reading and then add two more reasons of your own.
5. Identify expert authorities on the subject of Civil Rights based upon the reading and explain why.

**Document #2 – Personal Recollection of Sheyann Webb**

**March 7, 1965**

**Selma, Alabama**

Now the Edmund Pettus Bridge sits above the downtown; you have to walk up it like it’s a hill. We couldn’t see the other side, we couldn’t see the troopers. So we started up and the first part of the line was over. I couldn’t see all that much because I was so little; the people in front blocked my view.

But when we got up there on that high part and looked down we saw them. I remember the woman [next to her] saying something like, “Oh, My Lord” or something. And I stepped out to the side for a second and I saw them. They were in a line – they looked like a blue picket fence stretched across the highway. There were others gathered behind that first line and to the sides, along the little service road in front of the stores and drive-ins, there was a group of white people. And further back were some of Sheriff Jim Clark’s possemen on their horses. Traffic had been blocked.

At that point I began to get a little uneasy about things. I think everyone did. People quit talking; it was so quiet then that all you could hear was the wind blowing and our footsteps on the concrete sidewalk. Well, we kept moving down the bridge. I remember glancing at the water in the Alabama River, and it was yellow and looked cold. I was told later that Hosea Williams said to John Lewis, “See that water down there? I hope you can swim, ‘cause we’re fixin’ to end up in it.”

The troopers could be seen more clearly now. I guess I was fifty to seventy-five yards from them. They were wearing blue helmets, blue jackets, and they carried clubs in their hands; they had those gas-mask pouches slung across their shoulders. The first part of the march line reached them and we all came to a stop. For a few seconds we just kept standing, and then I heard this voice speaking over the bullhorn saying that this was an unlawful assembly and for us to disperse and go back to the church.

I remember I held the woman’s hand who was next to me and had it gripped hard. I wasn’t really scared at that point. Then I stepped out a way and looked again and saw the troopers putting on their masks. That scared me. I had never faced the troopers before, and nobody had ever put on gas masks during the downtown marches. But this one was different; we were out of the city limits and on a highway. Williams said something to the troopers asking if we could pray – I didn’t hear it but was told later that we could – and then I heard the voice again come over the bullhorn and tell us we had two minutes to disperse.

Some of the people around me began to talk then, saying something about, “Get ready, we’re going to jail,” words to that effect. But I didn’t know about that; the masks scared me. So the next thing I know – it didn’t seem like two minutes had gone by – the voice was saying, “Troopers advance and see that they are dispersed.” Just all of a sudden it was beginning to happen. I couldn’t see for sure how it began, but just before it did I took another look and saw this line of troopers moving toward us; the wind was whipping at their pant legs . . . .

All I knew is I heard all this screaming and the people were turning and I saw this first part of the line running and stumbling back toward us. At that point, I was just off the bridge and on the side of the highway. And they came running and some of them were crying out and somebody yelled, “Oh, God, they’re killing us!” I think I just froze then. There were people everywhere, jamming against me, pushing against me. Then, all of a sudden, it stopped and everyone got down on their knees, and I did too, and somebody was saying for us to pray. But there was so much excitement it never got started, because everybody was talking and they were scared and we didn’t know what was happening or was going to happen. I remember looking toward the troopers and they were backing up, but some of them were standing over some of our people who had been knocked down or had fallen. It seemed like just a few seconds went by and I heard a shout. “Gas! Gas!” And everybody started screaming again. And I looked and I saw the troopers charging us again and some of them were swinging their arms and throwing canisters of tear gas. And beyond them I saw the horsemen starting their charge toward us. I was terrified. What happened then is something I will never forget as long as I live. Never. In fact, I still dream about it sometimes.

I saw those horsemen coming toward me and they had those awful masks on; they rode right through the cloud of gas. Some of them had clubs, others had ropes or whips, which they swung about them like they were driving cattle. I’ll tell you, I forgot about praying, and I just turned and ran. And just as I was turning the tear gas got me; it burned my nose first and then got my eyes. I was blinded by tears. So I began running and not seeing where I was going. I remember being scared that I might fall over the railing and into the water. I don’t know if I was screaming or not, but everyone else was. . . . It was like a nightmare seeing it through the tears. I just knew then that I was going to die, that those horses were going to trample me. So I kind of knelt down and held my hands and arms up over my head . . . .

All of a sudden somebody was grabbing me under the arms and lifting me up and running. The horses went by and I kept waiting to get trampled on or hit, but they went on by and I guess they were hitting at somebody else. And I looked up and saw it was Hosea Williams who had me and he was running but we didn’t seem to be moving, and I kept kicking my legs in the air, trying to speed up, and I shouted at him, “Put me down! You can’t run fast enough with me!” But he held on until we were off the bridge and down on Broad Street and he let me go. I didn’t stop running until I got home. All along the way there were people running in small groups; I saw people jumping over cars and being chased by the horsemen who kept hitting them . . . .

When I got into the house my momma and daddy were there and they had this shocked look on their faces and I ran in and tried to tell them what had happened. I was maybe a little hysterical because I kept repeating over and over, “I can’t stop shaking, Momma, I can’t stop shaking.” And finally she grabbed me and sat down with me on her lap. But my daddy was like I’d never seen him before. He had a shotgun and yelled, “By God, if they want it this way, I’ll give it to them! And he started out the door. Momma jumped up and got in front of him shouting at him. And he said, “I’m ready to die; I mean it! I’m ready to die!” I was crying on the couch, I was so scared. But he finally put the gun aside and sat down. I remember just laying there on the couch, crying and feeling so disgusted. They had beaten us like we were slaves.”

1. Draw the scene the marchers witnessed as they reached the bridge – refer to the specific details in the reading.
2. Find each statement in the reading and underline it. Then place the events in chronological order with “1” being the first event.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Sheyann finally arrives home and her parents are angry at the situation

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Everyone got down on their knees, but they never got to pray

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Marchers walk up the Edmund Pettus Bridge

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Troopers put on their gas masks

\_\_\_\_\_\_ It gets quiet, so quiet you can hear the wind blowing

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Demonstrators are gassed with tear gas by the troopers

\_\_\_\_\_\_ The first part of the line of marchers reaches the troopers and comes to a stop

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Bullhorn says troopers advance and see that they are dispersed

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Sheyann turned and ran

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Bullhorn declares the march illegal and tells demonstrators to return to the church

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Hosea Williams carries Sheyann off of the bridge

1. What do the two accounts have in common? List as many as you can think of and underline them with the same color in your readings.
2. How are the two accounts related? What is their role in the greater Civil Rights Movement?
3. Identify expert authorities on the subject of Civil Rights based upon the reading and explain why.

**Document #3 – “When You Pray, Move Your Feet”**

**March 7, 1965**

**Selma, Alabama**

**“Bloody Sunday”**

Photo Courtesy of Representative John Lewis and the Library of Congress

John Lewis (on right in trench coat) and Hosea Williams (on the left) lead marchers across the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma, Alabama

1. Describe the location of the photograph
2. Based upon what you read in Document #1, what might John Lewis and Hosea Williams be remembering as they march?
3. What person stands out to you in the photograph? Explain why.
4. What types of weapons are the demonstrators carrying? Why?
5. Identify expert authorities on the subject of Civil Rights based upon the picture and explain why.

**Document #4 – Troopers Gassing and Beating Demonstrators**

**March 7, 1965**

**Selma, Alabama**

**“Bloody Sunday”**

Federal Bureau of Investigation Photograph

1. List all of the weapons you see in the photograph:
2. List all of the protection you see in the photograph:
3. Prove that the Alabama State Troopers had prepared in advance to take this action:
4. Compare this photograph to the account you read in Document #2 – what part of the situation might this photo represent? Explain your reasoning.
5. Identify expert authorities on the subject of Civil Rights based upon the picture and explain why.
6. **Document #5 – Alabama Police Confront Selma Demonstrators**

**March 7, 1965**

**Selma, Alabama**

**“Bloody Sunday”**

Federal Bureau of Investigation Photograph

1. Identify the two opposing groups in the photograph:
2. Where in the town of Selma was this photo taken?
3. What things do you see in the photograph that represent the intensity of the situation:
4. Compare this photograph to the account you read in Document #2 – what part of the situation might this photo represent? Explain your reasoning.
5. Identify expert authorities on the subject of Civil Rights based upon the reading and explain why.

**Document #6 – Marchers across the Alabama River on the Edmund Pettus Bridge**

**March 21, 1965**

**Selma, Alabama**

New York World Telegram and Sun Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. <http://hdl.loc.gov.pnp/ppmsca.08101>

**Constitutional Guarantees**

|  |
| --- |
| **Proposition-Support-Reasoning Outline** |
| Topic: | In Document #1 the sheriff tells Willie, “You don’t have any constitutional rights in my town.” |
| Proposition: | In the Constitution it says \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and this right was being denied because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.Prove this is true using the Primary Sources provided and information from your textbook. |
| Support: | Facts: |
| Statistics: |
| Examples (from Primary Sources): |
| Expert Authority (from Primary Sources): |
| Logic and Reasoning: |

**Assessment Rubric**

|  |
| --- |
| **Constitutional Guarantees** **Proposition- Support – Reasoning Outline** |
| CATEGORY  | **4**  | **3**  | **2**  | **1**  |
| **Proposition** | Student has correctly identified a Constitutional Right that was denied African Americans and explains why in the because statement | Student has correctly identified a Constitutional Right that was denied African Americans and but no explanation is provided | Student has incorrectly identified a Constitutional Right that was denied African Americans but recognizes that there was injustice | Student has incorrectly identified a Constitutional Right that was denied African Americans and no explanation is given |
| **Facts** | Student has listed 5 facts that support their proposition | Student has listed 3-4 facts that support their proposition | Student has listed 1-2 facts that support their proposition | Student has listed no information or explanation |
| **Examples** | Student has listed 4-5 examples from the Primary Sources provided or from their textbook that clearly support their proposition | Student has listed 3-4 examples from the Primary Sources provided or from their textbook that clearly support their proposition | Student has listed 1-2 examples from the Primary Sources provided or from their textbook that may support their proposition | Student has listed 0 examples from the Primary Sources provided or from their textbook OR listed information is not related to proposition |
| **Expert Authority** | Student has correctly selected 3 expert authorities on the issue and explained why | Student has correctly identified 2 expert authorities on the issue and explained why | Student has correctly identified 1 expert authority on the issue and explained why | Student has not identified any expert authority OR has not explained why their selections are experts |
| **Logic and Reasoning** | Student has successfully proved their proposition’s validity with many accurate facts, justified expert authorities, statistics and correct examples from Primary Sources | Student has proved their proposition’s validity with some accurate facts, justified expert authorities, statistics and correct examples from Primary Sources | Student has tried to prove their proposition’s validity with some facts, an expert authority, a few statistics and some correct examples from Primary Sources | Student has unsuccessfully proved their proposition’s validity with inaccurate facts, unjustified expert authorities, no statistics and incorrect examples from Primary Sources |
| **Comments:** |  |  |  |  |
| **Scoring:** |  |  |  |  |

Sources:

Document #1 – Willie Bolden’s Recollections from My Soul is Rested by Howell Raines. Copyright 1977 Howell Raines.

Document #2 – Sheyann Webb Personal Recollection from Selma, Lord, Selma, by Webb, Nelson and Sikora, 1980, The University of Alabama Press.

Document #3 – “When You Pray, Move Your Feet”, Library of Congress, American Memory, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/mar07.html>

Document #4 – Troopers Gassing and Beating Demonstrators, Federal Bureau of Investigation Photograph, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/mar07.html>

Document #5 – Alabama Police Confront Selma Demonstrators, Federal Bureau of Investigation Photograph, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/mar07.html>

Document #6 - Marchers across the Alabama River on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, New York World Telegram and Sun Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. <http://hdl.loc.gov.pnp/ppmsca.08101>

Background Paragraph Information:

Today In History: First March from Selma, Library of Congress, American Memory, March 7. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/mar07.html>

Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement. National Park Service. <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/index.htm>

King, Eulogy for Jimmie Lee Jackson, 3 March 1965, MMFR-INP